SEE, JUDGE, ACT

– John C. Cort

THE

# Commonweal

## The American Farmer

by Mary C. Forster

## When Catholics Turn Communist

by Gunnar D. Kumlien

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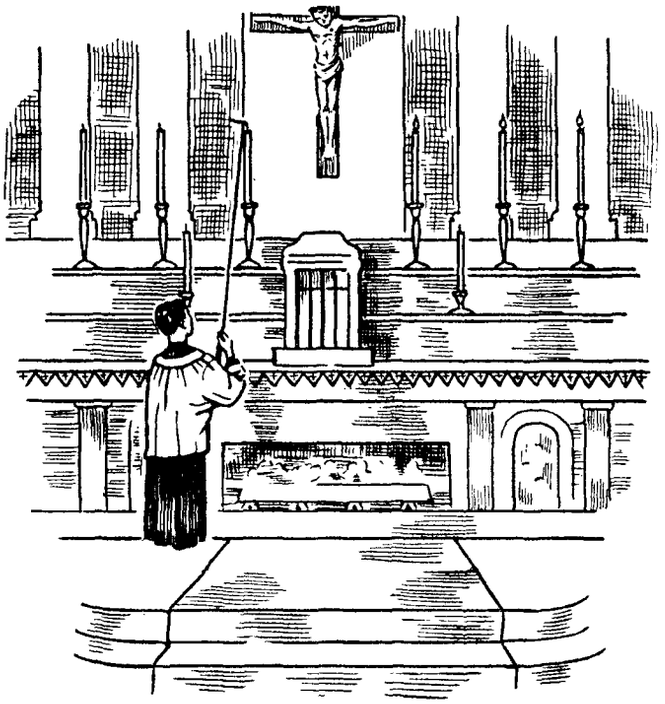

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THE

# Commonweal

week by week

## THE WEAPON OF FREEDOM

DURING the last few weeks the newspapers have carried lengthy reports on the defection of two key Communist officials to the Western cause. In Berlin, Soviet Secret Police Captain Nikolai Khokhlov revealed that he had been sent with two accomplices on an assassination mission; renouncing the Soviet, he asked and received asylum in the West. In Australia, the Third Secretary of the Soviet Embassy broke with the Soviet Union and fled to the Australian police, bringing with him documents to buttress his account of widespread Communist spying in Australia. Shortly afterward, under conditions rarely duplicated outside of a spy thriller, his wife was rescued at pistol point from Communist agents and granted asylum in Australia.

These are just two recent cases in a long list. Igor Gouzenko, Yuri Rastvorov, Victor Kravchenko—some of the names involved are well known. But there are others who came without front-page stories, and they continue to come by the thousands, slipping silently across prohibited borders under cover of darkness, smashing through frontier barriers in a painfully created homemade tank, making the dash for freedom in whatever way opportunity offers.

Those who flee the Soviet represent almost all walks of life, and their reasons for coming are probably as varied as the individuals themselves. Some saw the outside world for the first time during the war years and could no longer swallow the Communist claim that Western workers live in poverty and near-slavery. Some had friends and relatives disappear in one of the periodic purges, or themselves feared a purge. Others have always hated the regime and simply seized the first chance that arose to escape. Whatever the reasons, they were impelling enough to overcome national sentiment and natural inertia among thousands of fugitives from the Iron Curtain countries in the years since the second World War. And from that fact, Americans can well take comfort. For it is important to remember that the war in which we are engaged is not only a war of diplomacy and armies, but one of ideas. We cannot hope to win the war by depopulating the Soviet and its satellites, but the thousands of refugees offer a satisfying index to our strength.

This nation has been catapulted into a position of world leadership. Whether we like it or not—and many Americans obviously do not—the nations of the world are increasingly divided into two camps. In one of these the United States exercises undisputed leadership. By force of circumstances largely beyond our control, the future of the world as we know it depends to a large extent on the way in which the United States exercises its stewardship.

Because this is so, it is important to stop every now and then to realize what our strength is. That strength goes far beyond our material power in steel production or our output of planes and tanks—impressive and indispensable as these are. But the strength of the Western alliance is mainly centered around the truly revolutionary idea of freedom, around Western concepts of the dignity of the human person and the consequently inalienable rights of that person.

HERE is the main source of our strength, and it is important that we in the United States realize this fact. Freedom is, so to speak, our stock in trade. And in the long run this concept is one that is truly subversive of all that totalitarian regimes stand for. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from search and seizure without warrant, respect for due process of law and protection for the unpopular opinion—these are key weapons in the war of ideas, and any one who would weaken or abridge them is playing into the hands of the enemy. He is giving away our best weapons, no matter how piously or patriotically he may protest that it is all for freedom's protection. Liberty is not served with the despot's tools, and the refugees do not flee to the West in the search of more efficient forms of thought control.

In the heat of the day it is easy to lose sight of this fact. We are an easy-going people. Many U.S.



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citizens were perhaps slow to awaken to the threat of Communist aggression—though we doubt that the number was ever as great as some observers like to believe. But now, in 1954, the cold war with the Soviet has been under way for the better part of a decade. Our problem is not now primarily one of awakening people to the necessity of protecting our vital institutions from infiltration. Instead our major problem is to rally the American people; it is imperative that U.S. citizens unite behind consistent, long-range measures with which to wage the battle against the Soviet Union.

In this war internal security is essential, but it should be clear that it is only one part of the overall struggle. We need to devote a larger part of our energies to positive measures which will encourage understanding and strengthen our ties with our allies. We need affirmative action to win over those nations like India which are still suspicious of our motives and the character of our leadership. We need to re-affirm and enlarge our plans to help create in impoverished areas a political and economic climate which will be unfavorable to the spread of Communism. And we need to build a truly bi-partisan foreign policy, with prior consultation and joint responsibility, free of partisan political name-calling. It is to such tasks that the largest portion of our energies should be devoted.

### THE CHOICE

RECENT British and American assurances about committing their troops to the European Continent indefinitely have failed to produce the desired effects in France, where the European Defense Community remains opposed and unratified. The American pledge would indeed have appeared more wholehearted and ironclad if certain Senators had refrained from questioning at once the President's right to make such a promise. But in recent months the French have felt so harassed by their own immediate domestic and international woes that it is extremely doubtful whether public statements by a few United States Senators could make the difference between the ratification or rejection of the European Army program by the French nation.

If that army fails to materialize, certain things are inevitable that will be unpalatable to France. The first will be a big change in Western Germany, where up to now the able and moderate Adenauer regime has kept the militarists well in hand. The anxiety now is that if his policy of moderation proves to be barren of tangible results and Germany fails to attain an appropriate role in the defense of Europe against the Soviets, less statesmanlike leaders will take over. The German General Staff will rise from the ashes. German militarism will once again be in command.

Under these conditions the Western Allies could in all probability be forced to relinquish their present right to intervene in Germany if democratic institutions should be threatened there. If Germany again functions as an authoritarian state, its immediate neighbors would stand threatened anew. The danger of a German attempt to reconquer lost territory in the East, of setting off another war, would increase. The remarkable economic comeback of Western Germany has led to a revival of national self-confidence.

Yet, if there is no EDC, the United States will have little choice but to turn to Germany for an outright alliance whatever the character of its new ruling regime. For a power vacuum in Western Europe, next to a dynamic and aggressive Soviet domain, is unthinkable. Such an alliance would be anything but popular throughout the Continent or in the British Isles, but in such an emergency popularity would be an extremely secondary factor.

In the five years since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established great progress has been registered in the matter of Europe's defenses thanks to the protection of the atom bomb. But in the interval the Soviets have greatly improved the striking power of their own armed forces. This is hardly the moment for Europe to lower its guard. The organization of an effective European defense force is as important as ever.

Here is an area in foreign policy where the decision lies primarily in the hands of others. France holds the key to the solution. And the outcome of the war in Indochina will greatly affect the ex-

## NEXT WEEK

FRANCOIS MAURIAC discusses religion in the world today in the Spring Book Number.

"What [the totalitarian states] ask is the gift of the person, the sacrifice of one's most secret thoughts. The cult of the Roman Caesar did not imply the denial of the infinite Being; but today we know how far the bloody idols of the State and the Party go in their demands. But here is the mystery: We denounce the idols of the peoples behind the Iron Curtain and are blind to those idols whose cult we ourselves follow. And yet what strange powers of deification possess the man of our times, even when he is a Christian. Indeed, have we not deified all that we are? . . ."



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tent of the French commitment in Europe. America's big job is to convince. There must be no question as to our determination to hold the line, no doubt as to the character of our intentions. We must somehow make plain that we view the European Defense Community not primarily as a first line of defense of the continental United States and a battle terrain far removed from our own shores, but as the best means of defending Europe itself and forestalling another war. We have also to convince the French and other Europeans, among other things, that we will never resort to independent action even in the common defense. For without the EDC there would be only the most gloomy prospect for Europe and the defense of the West.

### CARDINAL STRITCH ON EDUCATION

AT the recent convention of the National Catholic Educational Association held in Chicago, Cardinal Stritch, Archbishop of the host city, welcomed the delegates and took the opportunity to offer some enlightening observations.

Thirty or forty years ago, the Cardinal pointed out, a great deal of energy had to be spent on convincing Catholics of the need and desirability for parochial education; the immediate problems were those of building schools and ironing out numberless problems that arose after the schools were built. In those days, the Cardinal said, "we had few precedents to guide us; we had to use our wits, cut corners and hope for the best. . . . Frequently we had to be satisfied with the good and long for the best."

Today, Catholic education has come to be generally accepted; there is no longer any debate in the Church about its importance. The problem now is one of trying to find room for all who desire religious education for their children. An increased birth rate, a larger percentage of Catholic children applying to the parochial schools, the swing to suburban living, have all created new challenges. One of the greatest needs is for more teachers, specifically lay teachers who will be specially trained for work in the nation's Catholic schools. When Catholic education was a more modest enterprise, the schools could be staffed by those who had devoted their lives to Christian education in the various religious orders. These Religious will continue to play the dominant role in Catholic education, but the time has come, the Cardinal advised, to open up the doors to the laity. "We must not look upon the engagement of lay teachers in our schools as a passing provision." Such teachers will be a permanent part of the educational scene and, the Cardinal added, surely with tongue in cheek, this "is not any sort of calamity." It is up to the Catholic colleges and universities to undertake the training of parochial-school lay teachers.

The Cardinal warned the educators against complacency and added that one of the pressing problems of the moment is to meet the needs within the Catholic system of "exceptional" children. He referred especially to blind children, the educable but subnormal, and those with an "unfortunate home background." Harried public-school teachers, who are often known to sigh when they hear that the Catholic schools have a much lower rate of delinquency, must have taken comfort in the Cardinal's frank statement: "It is not a tribute to us that frequently we have solved the problem of the handicapped and the delinquent child by excluding them from our schools." It is an old complaint that delinquent children are expelled from Catholic schools and turned over to public education and then Catholic spokesmen denounce the public schools for the very delinquency which in many cases they themselves wished on them.

The Cardinal spoke of the relationship between Catholics and the public-school system, again emphasizing the view that sees the parochial and public school as partners rather than as antagonists or rivals. Speaking of tax-supported schools, he said: "We are interested in these schools. . . . We have no sympathy with carping, destructive critics who aim their criticism at our tax-supported schools without reason and facts."

While stating clearly that the Catholic school is the best solution to the question of religious education, Cardinal Stritch spoke sympathetically of the desire on the part of many to give religion a part in public-school education. "We cannot agree with them in many of their proposals, but we do admire the spirit that prompts these proposals."

The Cardinal touched on a very important point when he added: "Democracy is a political philosophy and we Catholics of the United States subscribe to that political philosophy. It is not a religion and when educators seek to make it a religion they commit a very grave and dangerous mistake. If the public schools in their curricula under the law of our land must be neutral in religious matters, they also must avoid any favoritism towards groups whose naturalistic and rationalistic theories have acquired a sort of dominance in many fields of education and who seek to make public-school education a postulate of the right functioning of our democracy." In closing, the Cardinal again affirmed faith in the public-school system: "We are keenly aware of the importance of them in our country. . . . We know the error of generalizing specific facts and incidents in wide statements. We know how easy it



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is to call half truths whole truths. We are earnestly trying and asking God to give us the light and the strength as citizens of our country to do all we can to make our tax-supported schools better and better as the years go on."

## GENEVA

THE Geneva conference opens in a grim season. Dienbienphu, its perimeter contracted, is on the verge of being extinguished. The only hope appears to lie in the arrival of the relief column from Laos, capable of a diversionary attack on the Viet Minh siege force. But in Geneva the weather is lovely and the gardens bright.

The military situation in Indochina has prompted the French to ask for the intervention of United States and British air power. The request was refused—for the present, at least. But while there were compelling reasons for the refusal, the result may be very bad. If Dienbienphu falls, France's will to continue falls with it, and with it too will fall the morale of Viet Namese anti-Communism. Bao Dai has already accused the French of contemplating a partition of his country. Such a partition is being called for by the Russians: the creation of a "buffer state" between China and Viet Nam.

Excluding a total withdrawal of one of the two contesting powers, three solutions are being discussed. The first is partition. The Soviet Ambassador in Paris, Sergei Vinogradov, has been advancing this idea not to officials of the French Foreign Ministry but to members of the National Assembly who are cool to the Laniel Government, to the EDC, and who are concerned with ending the war at almost any price. The Ambassador urges upon his listeners the argument that, after all, Germany is France's greatest danger, as she is Russia's historic enemy. He has not specified how large the buffer state should be, but large or small, its creation would be a conclusive Communist victory. There is little reason to think that a viable non-Communist state could be built in the south with the Indochinese anti-Communists convinced that their nation had been sold out by the French, and with a Chinese-supported Viet Minh state biding its time in the north. This solution to the Indochinese problem would be popular in France—and a capitulation in Southeast Asia.

The second proposal for Indochina is the formation of a coalition government, made up of representatives of the Viet Minh and the present Viet Namese state. This proposal is a mixing of oil and water. At the heart of any such scheme would be the control of the military forces in being. There is no reason to think that the Communists would hand over control of their troops to a government not wholly under their control, and there certainly is no reason to think that the West would be mad enough to form a coalition in which one party had an independent army larger than the army of the state itself. The history of such a coalition government would be brief and bitter, and one ending would be inevitable: total Communist domination.

The third solution would be to place Indochina under some kind of South Asian trusteeship, as Walter Lippmann has suggested. This is very attractive in the theoretical order, but there are some large practical obstacles, the chief one being whether India would be willing to so involve herself in the Cold War as to undertake a guarantee of Indochinese independence against all comers, East or West. Were she to do such a thing, we will have got out of a terrible situation with more advantages than we deserve. But, at this writing, such a solution seems very remote. The South Asian nations are also cool to the idea of a defense community—which, on the French record in Indochina, is taken to mean defense of colonialism.

What seems most likely is that this conference on Lake Leman will be like the earlier one in Berlin: the two forces will negotiate for propaganda advantage from fundamentally irreconcilable positions. But unlike Berlin, it seems improbable that the West will this time come out ahead in propaganda. And when it is finished, and the spring flowers in the Geneva gardens begin to fade, we are likely to have with us the same old necessity for pressing the Indochinese war and building a defense community in South Asia, and the same tragic problems hindering us in those tasks; in short, the same old stalemate, hardened a bit, more familiar, and thus a little easier to live with.

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*During the current week Commonweal subscribers will receive through the mails an important message from the Editor. This letter refers, among other things, to the changing though consistent role of the magazine during the past three decades. It also supplies the latest information on the Thirtieth Anniversary campaign. We earnestly commend this letter to our subscribers' considered attention. For the situation it presents has an important bearing on The Commonweal's whole future as an American journal of opinion.*



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# The American Farmer

**WHY DOES THE MAN ON THE LAND CHOOSE TO STAND ALONE AT A TIME WHEN ORGANIZATION IS THE PRICE OF SURVIVAL?**

MARY C. FORSTER

THE strength of free government lies in the enthusiasm of its citizens, and this national vitality, the life-blood of a free state, is found principally in the small property-holders. It can neither be purchased nor intimidated, and when this native exuberance diminishes, the state is past its first youth, and the loyalty of its people becomes static rather than dynamic. When this élan does not assert itself freely, it might be safely suggested that the heroic age of the country is over and no longer will its citizens rush forward eagerly to sacrifice life and property for the preservation of an ideal. This enthusiasm is natural to the man on the soil and he is the last to give it up. His distance from the blasé confusion makes it possible for him to feel that his few possessions represent a stake in the national welfare.

The modern farmer, however, has not escaped the cynical weariness of a disillusioned century. In one generation his occupation has fallen from the fundamental position of the indispensable to the nondescript position of the expendable. His surplus products make him surplus too. American farming has become a way of life so economically hazardous that it should repel anyone who has the intelligence to realize its risks, but, curiously, it attracts strong-minded people who like the long chance and the independence of being self-employed. The farmer stands alone.

But why does he chose to stand alone in an age when organization is the price of survival? There are two things that keep the farmer alive: hope, the annual resurgence, and his incredible sense of freedom. He has a subconscious fear that if in order to win greater freedom he throws in his lot with others, however honestly motivated, he'll lose the little freedom he has.

There are organizations and co-operatives that have achieved benefits which non-members enjoy as much as those who took the responsibility. These organizations represent every shade of thinking from the cautious right to the slightly irresponsible left, and they have a sizable membership. But still none of their leaders is satisfied with the percentage of the nation's farmers on their lists.

American agriculture is vast and no doctrinaire generalization can reach all of it. There are the potato grower of Maine and the cattleman of Texas, the sharecropper and the corporation farmer, but in the geographic and economic center lies a vast area where the people are neither rich nor poor. They own and operate their own small farms, usually under a burden of debt. These people have a sense of responsibility, courage and a wholesome moral tone that should equip them for powerful, uncompromising organization. But they choose to go it alone.

THE farmer is not only uninformed; he is misinformed. From childhood he has seen foreclosure, but he has never read enough history to understand enclosure. He has never learned what bigness may do to him if it moves to the country. He hopes to be big himself some day and feels that to identify himself with other small holders would preclude forever the small chance that he might become one of the barons. The one factor that keeps most farmers on the land is the magic of being self-employed, and their idea of aggregate evil is the conveyor belt.

In the rural mind unionism and the time-clock are indissolubly married; no one asks which of the couple did the courting. To the farmer, unionism is socialism and socialism is chaos; he can never be persuaded that socialism may perhaps be the inevitable result when a better system is permitted to break down or fall of its own weight.

The farmer's exaggerated respect for property makes him a jealous person rather than an envious one. Where the resentful city worker might demand that the rich man share his holdings, the farmer, equally resentful, is determined that no one shall make him share his own. He has a definite idea of ownership and it does not include any illusion that he "owns" the post office or a single brick in it. He wants the complete ownership of things for which he has a bill of sale; he has no interest whatever in the things he does not own.

Miss Forster has operated her own cattle farm near Whiting, Kansas, for more than a decade.



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Neighbors in a farm community are usually generous to each other. This is a holdover from the "mutual assistance" of the pioneers, and particularly in communities that are not wealthy, this spirit lives on with a minimum of self-aggrandizement. These people are capable of magnificent generosity but even in this, their idea of mutual help is that of loose, temporary federation—not union. In the country there is no throat-cutting competition, but the farmer's working life might be compared to a year-round county fair with his goods always on display, as are those of his neighbor.

NECESSITY is the mother of organization as well as invention, and rural necessity is usually well fed. Home produced food makes it possible for people to be desperately poor in regard to mortgages, unpaid bills and back taxes, and still see their children healthy, happy and well provided for. Because of this adequate diet and active, outdoor life, the farmer's energy is up to par, and he is always busy, too deep in work for self-pity.

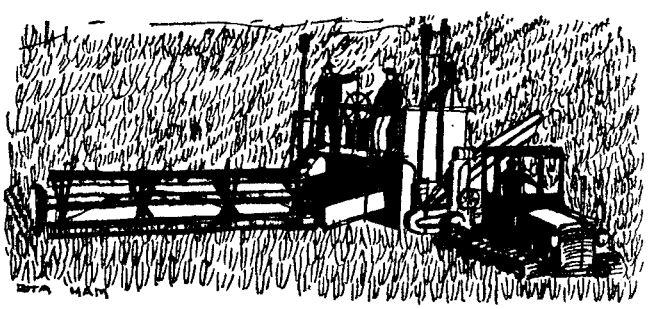
Good food keeps men from anarchy; it also keeps them from a realistic appraisal of their own situation. Very few farmers have the lean and hungry look that makes men think too much. They have no real argument with the status quo—all they ask is to be accepted as part of it. This deplorable goodwill is quite evident any time co-operation reaches the point where farmers meet for discussion. The evening is spent in local gossip and the inevitable refreshments; the meeting of the minds, instead of providing an opportunity for exploring the common problem, makes it possible for them to escape from it—at least for one evening. The social movement becomes a social amenity and the brave new idea is smothered under corny jokes and rich food.

The American farmer is an isolationist drawn to scale: puritanical, conservative in his politics (isn't it just possible that the reason the Democrats can't count on the farm belt is because of their inordinate campaign use of cheese-cake?), obsessed with hard work, law and order, free institutions, and grimly determined to keep his nose out of things "that don't concern him." When he sups with strangers he brings, not only a long spoon, but a thick armor of suspicion and a firm resolve not to sign anything.

In part, this suspicious attitude goes back to the papers that he or his father signed in the twenties, for fake oil stock, farm land in Texas (under six feet of water), mineral rights in Patagonia, and the like. And it must be admitted that his experience with the local chapters of some organizations has borne out his conviction that human weakness follows a gravitational flow toward the treasury. The farmer has difficulty in rising above personalities, and to him, the entire organization is the man at the desk. He knows him too well to have any faith or illusions.

IF the farmer has been reluctant to attempt any change in his own circumstances, there has been no dearth of interest in his lot by those outside the agricultural perimeter. Whether it is prompted by nostalgia or business acumen, nearly everyone has a "farm plan," and there is very little in most of them that would be acceptable to the people for whom they are meant.

When it comes to discussing farm problems, sentimental souls who remember so well what it was like "out at Grandma's" seem to be completely absorbed by externals. Rural life before two global wars, a stock crash and several police actions was simple, and the fiddle and the folk dance were part of that era; so, reason the sentimentalists, bring back the fiddle and the folk dance and re-establish the simple life. They disparage the effects of the high line, mechanized farming and standardized entertainment which wiped out the



visible differences between the city dweller and his country cousin. It was a better world, they will tell you, when rural people had a distinct culture, so bring back the distinct culture and you bring back the better world. (Would we have fewer divorces and less juvenile delinquency if our cities re-installed gas lights?)

To force farmers into a separatist culture is to reduce them to peasantry, and this they will fight with their last ounce of energy; indeed, it might prove the last straw that would induce them to organize. Of course, it can't be proved that the peasant's life isn't the happier one, but the modern farmer has rejected this; he has the right to be incorporated into the national fabric, to wear clothes instead of costumes, and he can hardly be made to believe that anyone could suggest such a thing with a straight face. Farmers are human beings, ambitious Americans, not the pilots of flying saucers, and furthermore they feel that they were not created for the entertainment of townfolk who go driving in the country on Sunday afternoon.

But the contenders on the other side of this extra-rural debate will no doubt save the farmer from the sentimentalists, for if farmers were forced into a sep-



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aratist culture they would be removed from the reach of the salesman. As long as American business has shiny-brights to sell, and these hard goods continue to make up most of the farm overhead, the farmer's efficiency, his own Frankenstein monster, will protect his children from being marked people and will make it possible for them to have an equal chance. And this is something worth fighting for. The ghetto spread over millions of acres would be no more desirable than its city counterpart confined to a few blocks. The farmer, modern and streamlined, has contributed less to the decadence of our age than any other class, and this writer does not concede that homespun in the country would have held back the flood.

IN the minds of the practical, "sensible" people, the farmer has only two reasons for being alive: to produce cheap raw materials for their factories and packing plants and then, by some miracle, be in a position to pay for expensive finished products from those same factories and plants. This would reduce the problem to a bloodless proposition: is it economically feasible for any segment of the population to be considered expendable in the interest of greater efficiency? If the farmer's only value is that of a draft horse ("no matter how you shift the tax burden, the farmer has to pay it") then the only thing is to follow through and let the avalanche come.

Time is running out. If we go into another full scale depression, most of the small holders will be wiped out. They can't hang on as long as they did in the early thirties because their overhead is so much higher. The spreading drought is another factor. Government action is the only solution; the farmer should be guaranteed the same protection as industry.

If there were an intelligent shift of emphasis from expedient stop-gaps to carefully considered long-range vision, from futile price supports that rob the soil and insult the intellect, to a constructive conservation of natural resources, both public confidence and the farmer's position would be restored. No one who reads can be ignorant of what is happening to our top soil; no one who eats can be indifferent to it. An ever-normal granary must be set up so that it cannot be converted into the ever-present pork barrel. A program can be written for the permanent benefit of mankind only if it is written for the good of the farmer who farms the soil.

Many of our American farmers are losing their nerve. The erosion that has been eating away the nation's farmlands has had a counterpart; there has been a spiritual leaching, a lessening of intangible resources. These men and women are like the sand which the processes of time have left beneath their feet while the good rich loam has disappeared. Soon these lives will be without a leaven which America can ill afford to lose.

***FROM ITALY***

# When Catholics Turn Communist

*Rome*

IS Italy really turning Communist? Are there any serious chances of preventing it? There undoubtedly have been signs of Communist progress since last year's elections; a recent big scandal again revealed the power of Communism, rocking the very foundations of bourgeois Italy. American observers are inclined to be pessimistic about the situation. Non-Communist Italians tend to be optimistic in their efforts to calm the concern of the Americans. Who is right?

The key might be found in a well-documented and practically unnoticed report published recently in the venerable fortnightly of the Italian parish clergy, *La Palestra del Clero*. It is a field report summing up the experiences of the innumerable parish priests who carry the brunt of the day-to-day fight against Communism. It sums up what these priests have discovered in the four years since the Holy Office issued its decree excommunicating Communists, and it is most depressing reading. Here are its conclusions: In these last four years even the most backward illiterates in Italy have had the time and opportunity to understand that, at the very least, Catholicism and Communism are incompatible. No one now can plead ignorance in good faith. Yet during this period Italian Communism has not even been slowed; 1,626,957 *more* baptized Italians have voted Communist or pro-Communist, which brings the total number of "Catholic Communists" to nearly ten million—from 31% to 35.4% of the total vote.

The report goes on to say that the attitude adopted towards Communist parishioners by the parish clergy no longer makes sense on the practical level. This attitude has been one of forbearance towards those who are in error, but utmost rigor against the error itself. It is a policy which has varied slightly from diocese to diocese and even from parish to parish (particularly in the most heavily Communist areas of the country, where Communists might make up half to three quarters of the population). The amazing thing—and this is the difference between Italy and France—is that a great proportion of the people who regularly vote Communist have proved (particularly in the countryside) to be as attached to their religious traditions as to Communism. Whereas in France the worker-priest movement was a reaction against the deadly isolation of the



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parish in a Communist area, in Italy the parishes in corresponding areas have not been at all isolated and in some cases have shown top figures in Easter Communions and other religious practices—particularly on the part of the women, both young and old.

The parish priests have sometimes found themselves in tragic dilemmas of conscience. They must ask themselves if more harm is not done by repelling a Communist who humbly asks for the sacraments than would be done by winking at the decree and attempting at the same time slowly to convert the Communist. They ask if the main thing is not to avoid losing contact with the parishioners, as so many French parish priests have done.

The parish priest has found himself confronted by otherwise good Catholics who respectfully but stubbornly refuse to believe him on this one point: Communism. These people believe everything the Church teaches except what it teaches on that subject. If the priest cites religious persecution in Soviet Russia and in China as concrete examples of the incompatibility between Catholicism and Communism, the reply is invariably the same: Italian Communism is different from Communism in other countries. Italian Communism has never proved to be anti-religious. Togliatti's strategy never openly to attack religion has paid dividends and paid well.

THE parish priests have found that the relationship between Communism and poverty is most elastic. The most poverty-stricken areas in Italy are not always the most heavily Communist. On the contrary, in Tuscany, Emilia and Romagna, Communism is strongest where the standard of living is comparatively high, or where it has been slowly but steadily rising.

It is natural that the Italian parish clergy are most disturbed by this overlapping between Communism and Catholicism. But it is asked if a more rigorous policy would be of any avail. Is it possible to treat approximately one out of every three Italians as if he were personally excommunicated?

Here the findings of the Italian clergy can be compared with the accomplishments of the French worker-priests—as recognized by the French hierarchy and published by the Roman Jesuits in a "white book" on the subject in *Civilta Cattolica*. Aside from the problem of the objections brought against their methods, there is no denying that the worker-priests succeeded in eliminating prejudice against the Church from among French workers, indeed, converting many of the workers—but at the same time they did not succeed in separating their converts from Communism. Here again the two overlapped. Nominally Catholic Communists or pro-Communists were converted into Communist or pro-Communist Catholics—and at what cost!

It becomes more and more evident that the Church was right in drawing the clear distinction between the two faiths. But the fact remains that in practice there is such an intricate overlapping, both in France and Italy, that radical surgery would be necessary to separate the two, and such surgery seems quite impossible for in present circumstances it would kill the patient. Particularly in Italy, Communism is part of the nation's body, as deep-seated as a vital and infected organ.

DOES this mean, then, that there is a real danger that the Communists could either legally or illegally seize power in Italy in the foreseeable future? This is quite another question. Pessimistic American observers follow the theoretical line and say yes, while non-Communist Italians who know their country with all its contradictions follow the practical line and say that such an assumption of power is improbable. To prevent such an event there is, first of all, the possibility of extreme political action—all the anti-Communist parties, including the Monarchists and neo-Fascists, joining together. This could mean the end of Christian Democracy as the leading central party. It has already happened on a small scale, during the recent by-elections in Castellamare di Stabia near Naples, and it has attracted considerable attention. Secondly, there are the police, who unquestionably are politically reliable and are well-equipped, largely with American material. Even if the Communists possess large hidden arms depots, it would be extremely difficult for them to stand up against a well-organized and well-trained police force, which presumably would in a pinch be backed up by NATO forces.

Thus while it seems impossible to eliminate the Communists, it also seems extremely unlikely that they could successfully seize power in the foreseeable future. They simply are there and must be reckoned with. What does their presence mean for Italy in, let us say, the next ten years?

If the present Russian "cold peace" policy continues, the Communists would probably specialize in being an extremely tough and aggressive opposition, jumping on every government weakness, pulling to the left when the government pulls to the right, reacting violently to any attempt to overstep the constitution, and thus incontestably exercising the influence a democratic opposition is supposed to exercise. Many foreign political observers in Italy agree that with the Communists safely kept within the limits of an opposition force, they have on several occasions proved useful, just as limited doses of poison can in certain circumstances be useful. Seen from a narrow Italian viewpoint, the Communists have other uses. If it were not for the Communist danger, Italy would not have received half the American aid which in fact has been given. A well-



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known rightist cartoonist here recently represented Italy as a machine, fed with American dollars, producing Communists who in turn stimulate Uncle Sam to pour more dollars into the machine.

BUT what would the Communists mean to Italy in event of a new war? The Communist minority would naturally make Italy a most uncertain ally for the West. The new Italian NATO army, American-equipped, is undoubtedly much better than the old one, but has one terrible flaw: as it is recruited through democratic and compulsory military conscription, it is politically unreliable. There are more or less efficient political controls placed on soldiers known to be Communists or fellow-travelers, but the fact remains that one out of every three soldiers is politically unreliable from the Western point of view. (And one out of three is a low estimate for the army as it has been established that the men in Italy are much more inclined, for various reasons, to be Communists than the women.)

The Communists cannot be eliminated from the army for that would make of them a privileged class, free from military obligations. They themselves do not want to be exempted, for they make no secret of that fact that the Party orders Communist soldiers to do their best and learn as much as possible. There is no such thing as a Communist conscientious objector in the NATO army! All of this, plus the number of Communists in the Italian factories and ministries, means that in the case of war the West would use the Italian army and Italian factories as little as possible for decisive actions or important war production. Consequently, unless Italy was to become a theater of war, which is unlikely, she would be safer from destruction than she would be if the Communists were not there.

One way or another, the Italian Communists confer a sort of neutrality on their country, a country where already the enemies of tomorrow are neutralizing each other. The Communists boast of this situation, claiming that this is what they mean when they speak of realizing a "peace policy" against the will of the "warmongering" ruling majority. The non-Communist Italians are aware of this situation, of course, and the prospect of Italy's being spared in a future war does not displease them. They rightly refuse to call it a consciously Machiavellian policy, for it is not. They simply consider it to be luck, the luck which Italy has so often had—*"lo stellone d'Italia,"* Italy's big lucky star.

GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN.

***SEE, JUDGE, ACT***

# From Small Groups A Big Movement

LAST December a YCW chaplain in India wrote to a friend in England, and the friend gave the letter to a friend, who gave it to me. I quote: "It is now nearly a year since we started YCW here. . . . We have twenty or thirty boys who have undergone some formation. . . . As you know, the approaching election is the vital issue before us. . . . Our boys also discussed the question. They finally decided to bring together as many young men as they could from the different parts of the State and give them an occasion to sit together and discuss ways and means to combat the Communist onslaught in the coming elections.

"They started working and were able to bring more than a thousand young men. . . . And at last a big demonstration was arranged in Ernabulam on the grounds in front of the temple. All people say that Ernabulam has not seen such a lively demonstration. Till this time this Catholic town had seen only Communist demonstrations. . . . The meeting was attended by not less than twenty thousand people; and it continued till one o'clock in the morning.

"And all this was the work of a few young chaps. This was a revelation to me. I never knew that so few could do such wonderful things. Men with real faith and charity can do wonderful things.

"Only then did I understand what Monsignor Cardijn used to say, namely, that you should have faith in these working people, that they can do great things."

THIS is the same Monsignor Joseph Cardijn who started the Young Christian Workers in Belgium about thirty-five years ago. He was then a young curate, the son of a miner, who was shocked and saddened by the loss of the working class to the Church and determined to do something about it.

What he did has grown into a movement uniting 1,293,000 active members in sixty-two countries of the world, with perhaps as many again loosely affiliated in a kind of fellow-traveler status. In addition to the Young Workers there are allied and similar movements among students, farming youth, intellectuals, and married couples. One of these, the Christian Family Movement, is an American adaptation of the Cardijn technique that has mushroomed in six years to five thou-



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sand couples in two hundred cities and forty-four states of the U.S.A.

The characteristic feature of the Cardijn technique is that it is based on the small group. The YCW pamphlets on how to start a section say firmly: "Begin with a few young workers. Three or four are sufficient, six or eight are even better. It is a mistake to take on a big number, some of whom are sure to retard the training of the others."

THE small group is not a form of organization that immediately appeals to the American spirit. The American spirit is expansive and goes for the big meeting, with the dynamic speaker and a lively discussion from the floor, shared in by maybe five extroverts who have had previous experience in public speaking themselves. This is climaxed by the passage of a resounding resolution that gives the faithful the illusion of sweeping all the filthy books off the drugstore counters, or all the Communists into the sea, or all the good Irish Catholics into public office.

This is the big meeting at its best. At its worst it is not even a big meeting, but a small meeting trying to look like a big meeting. The speaker is dull and puts everybody to sleep so that there is not even one extrovert awake at the end to ask a question. Other than the speaker, the chairman and the chaplain do all the talking and they often get pretty soporific too after a while. Nobody can think of a resolution to pass, much less a resounding one. If it weren't for the men who come out just to get away from their wives for a few hours, nobody would show up at the next meeting.

Most American organizations, including Catholic organizations, are based on the big-meeting technique. So are most forms of religious uplift and education, such as the Holy Hour, the church service, the Communion Breakfast, the retreat, and so on.

The obvious advantage of the small group is that it is possible to get everybody involved and participating. This not only makes for more interest on the part of the members. It also makes for a more interesting and fruitful discussion.

A friend of mine put it this way: "In a big group the people you hear from are the aggressive types who seldom have anything original or constructive to say because they are all wrapped up in themselves and are too busy projecting their own personalities to look at problems calmly and objectively. In a small group, on the other hand, you get a chance to draw out the quiet guy in the corner who has been doing some pretty sharp thinking on the subject, free from the emotional turmoil of 'the natural leader.' "

The big meeting is rather like the lecture system so popular in our colleges, which an academic wit once described as "the system of transferring a set of facts from the notebook of the lecturer to the notebook of the student without passing through the mind of either."

The small meeting is rather like the method of Socrates, who functioned best with a few students, whom he asked questions and tried to draw slowly toward the discovery of truth, until they had reached the point where they could express that truth in their own words and in terms of their own experience.

SMALLNESS is of course no guarantee of effectiveness. The discussion group has sometimes come to be synonymous with a yak-yak kind of inaction. That is why Cardijn insisted that his groups stick to the Inquiry method of See-Judge-Act.

Each meeting opens with prayer and includes a section known as the Gospel Inquiry. This consists of a reading of a portion of the Gospel and a short discussion about it, trying to understand it in terms of modern life. Then follows a Social Inquiry, presenting

a problem such as "Dating" or "The Young Worker and Money" or "Penetrating the Masses of Young Workers." The point is to *see* the problem in all its angles and aspects, then to *judge* the problem in the light of the Gospel, and finally to *act*, to do something toward solving the problem in a Christian way, no matter how small or insignificant that action may be.

This way the group has the feeling that it is accomplishing something and is encouraged by the spectacle of a few results here and there.

When the members of the section, as it is called, have reached some degree of formation in the apostolic Christian mold, they in turn go out and form sections of their own, so that every other week they will meet with their original section and in alternate weeks with their own section. And so the thing grows.

Another basic principle is that the chaplain says nothing until the end of the meeting. All discussion is led by a lay leader, and leadership passes from one member to another. Often the chaplain's most important



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work is preparing the leader to handle the discussion. This emphasis on lay leadership and lay responsibility avoids another chronic disease of so many Catholic organizations: the domineering chaplain.

THE YCW has not had the sensational growth in this country that the Christian Family Movement has had. The CFM is more of a white-collar group, though it has some working-class sections, and the slower growth of the YCW is perhaps a tribute to the tougher problems involved in working among proletarians. Certainly selling religion to young Americans has never been a picnic.

Even so, since it became a national movement in 1947 the YCW has spread to thirty-five cities and towns in nineten different states. Headquarters of both groups, as also of the Young Christian Students, is at 638 Deming Place, Chicago 14, Illinois. And the general chaplain of all three is Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand, a kind of American Cardijn in his power to inspire and lead both young and old to a new awareness of Christ and their own explosive possibilities when they are united in His service with a few kindred souls.

Also out of Chicago has come the first formalized application of the Cardijn technique to the trade union movement. This has been done by the Catholic Labor Alliance, an ACTU-like organization formerly committed to the labor school and big-meeting approach. The Alliance has over the past year started about six "service committees," as they are called, grouping rank-and-file unionists together, or full-time union officials, or management representatives, or writers.

And in Connecticut Father Joseph Donnelly, director of the Hartford Diocesan Labor Institute, is turning from the labor school to the small study group.

I REMEMBER that back in the thirties down at ACTU's New York heaquarters we used to get the JOC (*Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*) papers from Belgium and France. They had big exhortatory headlines in the style of *Allons enfants de la patrie!* There was always an exclamation point at the end of them. Some of us wanted to try the Cardijn approach to ACTU organization. But most ACTU leaders, and the priests too, could see only the French *élan* and *éclat* and figured it would never go with the hardboiled American worker.

But the *élan* and the *éclat* were only the French uniform for something old and sound. It is something that goes. And I believe it will go farther and deeper than anything that has yet been done by Catholics in the American labor movement.

JOHN C. CORT.

# THE SCREEN

## *LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL*

HOLLYWOOD stars are traipsing to the four corners to add their familiar glamor to films set in unfamiliar places. Although the locales usually have something new and interesting to offer, the same cannot always be said about the stars. However, one can hardly blame the cast for the lethargic film that has been made from Robert Standish's best-seller novel, *Elephant Walk*. Producer Irving Asher's project seemed jinxed from the start, but no doubt the biggest blow was Vivian Leigh's illness and subsequent withdrawal after the movie was partly finished.

Elizabeth Taylor, certainly one of Hollywood's most beautiful stars, now plays the lead in this rather *Rebecca*-like story about an English girl who marries a plantation owner and goes with him to Ceylon where his house and everything else around the place are dominated by his dead father. Even her husband (Peter Finch) accepts orders from beyond the tomb. The bewildered and rebuffed girl turns to her husband's American overseer (Dana Andrews) for consolation and is about to run away with him when cholera plagues the plantation.

"Elephant Walk" (directed by William Dieterle) has fascinating Ceylon backgrounds and plenty of tea-plantation stuff but lumbers along with a pace almost as heavy as that of its elephants. The elephants, in fact, are the most impressive part of the whole show.

RELUCTANTLY, I also have to report that Italian producer-director Vittorio De Sica's first American language film, "Indiscretion of an American Wife," also labors hard with only so-so results. The picture isn't really bad; it's just that we expect so much from De Sica after "The Bicycle Thief" and "Shoeshine." "Indiscretion" stars the very handsome and shiny Terminal Station in Rome as well as such handsome and popular American stars as Jennifer Jones and Montgomery Clift. The story and script, written and rewritten by many authors including Cesare Zavattini and Truman Capote, try to be another "Brief Encounter" but don't quite make the grade.

The film's theme of an erring and confused wife is interesting and moving enough, but the dialogue is of a flossy and bookish quality; and De Sica, instead of making his two principal characters real, relies on incidental characters, mostly travelers coming and going in the station, who add touches of humor and everyday life to the whole piece.

Miss Jones is excellent in the scenes after she realizes her shame; and Clift, who underplays throughout, is at



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his best when he sees there is only one solution to their tangled affair.

THE King Brothers (Maurice and Frank), who have made a number of exciting movies on a low budget, yanked their cast to Munich, Germany, to produce "Carnival Story." As far as really using Munich and all the local color they had available, they might as well have stayed in Hollywood. They tell a shoddy tale about a woman (Anne Baxter) of loose morals in postwar Germany who just cannot resist a carnival barker (Steve Cochran) even after she marries a nice high diver (Lyle Bettger) who restored her self respect and taught her how to dive. The picture whips up some tense scenes during the diving stunts but sinks to a low level during the melodrama. The supporting cast includes George Nader, Jay C. Flippen, Adi Berber and a lot of carnival folk; most of the latter, however, have as little to do with the pictorial effects as the unused German scenery. "Carnival Story" is more interested in sex than in the glamor of circus life.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

# THE STAGE

### *THE THREEPENNY OPERA*

MR. Louis Kronenberger is only the latest commentator to note a central truth about the American as artist: the fact that we are never so happy as when we are taken in adulteration, never so spuriously active as when we are making "plays out of books, musicals out of plays, *Aida's* into *My Darlin' Aida's.*" Theoretically, of course, the practice, however sterile, is defensible; practically, its results commonly approach the grotesque. Mr. Marc Blitzstein's rendering of the Bert Brecht-Kurt Weill "Die Dreigroschenoper" does not quite permit these strictures—it is everywhere competent and serviceable—yet I cannot imagine a more melancholy illustration of the vicious toll of adaptation than this production presently on view at the Theatre de Lys. Mr. Blitzstein has found occasionally for Brecht's lyrics a cocky, insolent, admirable tone, but largely at the cost of tang and savor and the social refractions which give the work its trenchant moral pertinence. His translation of the locale from Hogarth's Soho to Victorian London is not disabling, though it does diminish the social *raison d'etre* of the piece. Rather, it is a much more subtle process of erosion to which one must object: a muting of what is raw and spiky, a heightening of everything obvious, an ultimately frivolous abuse of the spiritual anguish which is, in this work, so importunate and direct. Indeed, taken as a whole, Mr. Blitzstein's translation seems to me inferior both as art and truth to that by Desmond Vesey and Eric Bentley which is included in the latter's anthology, *From the Modern Repertoire* (*I*).

Because it is one of the indisputable masterpieces of our century, "The Threepenny Opera" survives this adulteration. What it cannot quite survive is the weight of an uncommonly gross and offensive production: one at which I confess myself truly shocked. Shocked and puzzled, because Brecht has given us an explicit, detailed commentary on the nature and meaning of his work, and the manner in which it must be performed. "The Threepenny Opera," he notes, "is a representation of bourgeois society, and not only of the underworld, of the 'disreputable.'" If this premise is abrogated, the piece becomes outrageous, its exacerbated irony inexplicable, the savagery of its satire unintelligible. At the Theatre de Lys, it is not only abrogated, it does not seem to have existed: with several exceptions, the cast plays in an obviously total innocence of the fundamental *intention* of the work. I suppose one must grant them good will, but I am not at all certain I would rather be taken for a fool than a knave.

How, for example, is one to match the MacHeath of this production—an amorous spiv, a sort of George M. Cohan of the waterfront—with the steady, humorless, respectable businessman of Brecht's creation? How account for a perky, insolent Polly, blonde and succulent, false as her eyelashes, a dainty canary piping away shrilly in this nest of vultures? Or a Mrs. Peachum, raddled and rouged and complete with whisky nose; or a Police Commissioner who suggests a fugitive from Mack Sennett, or a Jonathan Peachum like some inferior caricature of a minor Dickens hypocrite. Brecht specified that MacHeath's gang is made up of naturally steady, "sedate men . . . some of them inclined to obesity . . . all quite affable outside their profession." He noted that they should never be portrayed "as a collection of gloomy individuals with red handkerchiefs round their necks, who frequent low haunts and with whom no respectable man would drink a glass of beer." No one would wish to ride the subway with the thugs in this current production.

Whatever its other distortions, the evening does offer two primary pleasures: that of seeing Lotte Lenya recreate her original role of the slut Jenny, and the opportunity of hearing again this most impressive of contemporary scores for the theater. Mme. Lenya is an artist of temperament, poise and discipline; irresistibly she compels attention. Her work in this revival has both refinement and power; it is sustained everywhere with the delicacy and intuition of one completely in control of the effects she wishes to achieve. When Mme. Lenya takes the stage alone with her ballad of



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Jenny, The Pirate's Bride, she has the ability to open us to the poetry and pity which is the impulse of this work; she can wound us with it, and make us turn our eyes inward. She is the point of art and style from which the rest of this production is so sad a decline.

How grateful, too, we must be for so brilliant a rendering of Kurt Weill's score; this powerful and eloquent record of the emotional history of our time with its insistent solicitation, its mockery and sour lyricism, the tawdry passion and sudden, terrible pathos which informs it, the reverberating echoes of George Grosz and Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* and the Dietrich of "The Blue Angel." In "The Threepenny Opera," Brecht and Weill gave us a permanent document of society, transmuted by art into a passionate vision of the anguish, the ineradicable corruption and irreducible dignity of man. How sad that their masterpiece should go wandering still in search of a production, their complete imaginative act lack the completion which is a necessity of all timeless, durable art, but especially of theater. (*At the Theatre de Lys.*)

RICHARD HAYES.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### "A NEW KIND OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL"

New York, N. Y.

TO the Editors: I'd like to add a few observations regarding the question raised in Sister Mary Evelyn's "A New Kind of Catholic School" [April 23], and which you discuss in your opening editorial in the same issue: "Why do our Catholic school graduates as a group have so little impact on the world?"

First, I think it should be noted that the same kind of question is being asked by thoughtful men regarding the impact of college graduates in general, Catholic and non-Catholic, on mid-century America. . . .

Perhaps we forget that Catholic colleges are typically American, at least in that like other kinds of colleges in the United States, they have become highly vocationalized. Americans, and this includes American Catholics, have long asked of education only that it train them to make a living. Today, by and large, America is getting the kind of education it wants. Perhaps, we should add, the kind it deserves. Such a kind of education does not much emphasize "a sense of spiritual mission." In the opening essay of his latest book, *The Water and the Fire*, Father Gerald Vann sees in the sphere of education "tragic proof" that the world we live in "reflects and expresses the inner world of our own souls." "The age-old ideal of education as the quiet pursuit of wisdom, of fullness of life, of a rich, deep completion of the whole personality, is disappearing; and is being replaced by a more and more exclusively utilitarian scramble to acquire knowledge of

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facts, and especially material facts, and above all, commercially rewarding facts." . . .

Perhaps in this connection we might well be reminded of how Cardinal Newman expressed his view of the college graduate's spiritual mission, the social utility of his idea of liberal education in so far as it aimed "at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life."

Isn't there some evidence about, that America of 1954 would be incalculably helped by the social value Newman saw in a liberal education?

You refer also in your editorial about the discouragement of "too many Catholic graduates" as regards "translating the full Christian vision of society with which they leave school." I wonder just how many graduates have that full Christian vision to begin with, much less to translate it. Perhaps there is no more lamentable illustration of how close to practical affairs the Catholic college, like other American colleges, has come than to note the "practical" way religion as a course, or group of courses, is taught. What the Catholic college too often produces is not a graduate "with a full Christian vision," not one "trained in the application of a doctrine *believed* to the whole of a life to be *lived,*" but as the late Father Bull of Fordham once put it, the ready-answer Catholic, one who has merely the formulas of the Catholic religion, who sees Catholicism only as a creed and not at all as a culture. . . . In recognition of this worst failure of higher Catholic education the Manhattan College Catalogue refers to "that special brand of secularism among Catholics, which seems to be as prevalent proportionately as the more conscious secularism of the non-Catholic world," and which in consequence, leads "a vast number of Catholics to adopt the same attitude as the secular society around them toward things of the 'natural' order, and in regard to these things think the same thoughts and speak the same language as those who have not the faith."

BROTHER CORMAC PHILIP, F.S.C.
*Manhattan College*

Rockford, Ill.

TO the Editors: As a reader of The Commonweal and a Catholic high school teacher I have been asked three questions by Sister Mary Evelyn, "A New Kind of Catholic School" [April 23]. "Is such a school necessary?" My answer is, "No." "Is it desirable?" Such has not been proved. "Can the results it hopes to accomplish be achieved within the framework of existing institutions?" Conceivably they can.

Now I would like to ask Sister a question. Admittedly the experiment of the midwestern high school teacher who had her students do field work in Catholic social agencies or institutions has great merit. But why build a new type of school to achieve this goal? Why not simply allow time for field work in our social studies classes?

I am conscious of our failure to turn out integrated Catholic lay people. If we agree that a new type of school is necessary for this job, we must admit the impossibility of our present system to gear itself for the job. That I will not admit.

Our present Catholic school system has its disabilities but they are not inherent in the system. Our failure is threefold. First in the religion class. By and large, Christianity is not taught as a Life to be lived. More often it is presented as a code of do's and don'ts. A deep and abiding love for the liturgy is not inculcated. This is what ultimately must give the students the apostolic drive and dedication.

Second, we are weak on papal social teaching. It is not a lack of insistence from the Vatican or of loyalty on our part to the Pope. We just don't sufficiently understand the role of Catholic social thought in the making of citizens and saints of our students. This is the theological weakness of our age which Cardinal Suhard has scored in his pastoral, *Growth or Decline.* The theology by which we live and teach is not sufficiently incarnational in the Suhard sense. It is ghetto-minded and defensive. When the social encyclicals *are* taught within this narrow theological framework more than likely they will lack vitality and be studied apart from the body of current social facts. To the student they will be dry bones.

Third, we are weak in encouraging the lay apostolate. The Young Christian Students, the Sodality, and other forms of Catholic Action should be voluntary and extra-curricular but actively encouraged.

One argument against a special school is that all students should be receiving this general formation in the liturgical life of the Church, its social or papal principles, and Catholic social action. Special training in the Christian life through common prayer, study and action after formal schools days are terminated is not new. For example, we have the Grail for women in Loveland, Ohio. Maybe Sister wants a city form of the Grail. If so, so be it. We have the Young Christian Workers for school leavers, the Christian Family Movement for married people, and the Catholic labor school movement offering adults training for Christian industrial life.

Sister Mary Evelyn is dealing with a vulnerable aspect of Catholic education, but unless she further clarifies her special type of school, I shall be content to continue trying to perfect what we have.

(*Rev.*) DENNIS J. GEANEY, O.S.A.



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# The Poet's Eye Glancing from Earth to Heaven

POETS AND MYSTICS. By E. I. Watkin. Sheed & Ward. $5.

By ERWIN W. GEISSMAN

I CAN recall first coming across Watkin's books as an undergraduate and responding to them as to an intellectual revelation. Here was firm footing in the confused and confusing morass of philosophical aesthetics. Here was a man who wrote about the life of prayer as one who had lived it and knew whereof he spoke. Through the years he has lost none of the early strength. He is still a wise and learned guide, always understanding, always charitable, always seeking. His new book is rich with fine things and should have a powerful influence, especially on readers who are making the author's acquaintance for the first time. The fine things will hardly be overlooked, which shall be my excuse for concentrating on certain cautions and reservations.

Mr. Watkin is writing of poets and mystics but his eye, as of old, is on the mystics rather than the poets (only three of thirteen chapters are properly speaking on poets and the choice of poets is significant: Crashaw, Vaughan, Ruth Pitter). The reason is not far to seek. To Mr. Watkin the intuition involved in poetry is a kind of natural mysticism ("intuition of the ontological dependence of the created spirit on God and the union it involves"). The intuition may be "indistinct," "subconscious," "inchoate," but it is there or there is no genuine poetry. This view of poetry is not peculiar to Mr. Watkin, of course; it is at least as old as Plato. It is a theory which nicely accounts for one among many kinds of poetry. It is dear to admirers of William Blake, and airy nonsense to admirers of Dryden and Molière.

The absurdities to which the exclusively mystical view of poetry can lead are amply illustrated in Watkin's remarks on Shakespeare (to my knowledge the only inept piece of work Watkin has ever written). When the vision fails only the taking of infinite pains can carry the poet on till his next illumination. Shakespeare did not take pains. We even know the reason: he was a Forsyte; a money-grubbing businessman with no artistic conscience. Conjectural biography is never a very happy art. When it is based on conjecture a generation or more out of date we begin to wonder about scholarly conscience.

Watkin's discussion of tragedy is a logical outgrowth of his theory of poetry: "tragic conflict . . . involves the presuppositions of a non-religious interpretation of life." It cannot be written or enjoyed by religious man, unless he suspends his religious convictions and, for the moment, immerses himself within the limitations of the natural. Here it seems to me that Watkin is ignoring the actual experience of man, religious or otherwise. The awareness of reality on the natural plane is not less real than religious experience. To most men it is the only reality experienced directly. That it is a limited and finite reality is precisely the key to tragic experience. "Religious man" does not have to reduce himself to the finite in order to understand tragedy. He is in the finite, willy-nilly. When he rejects it, he incidentally rejects himself, the Incarnation and the Humanity of Christ.

With the mystics Watkin is on surer ground, and here he has some excellent chapters, especially on the seventeenth century. He makes the best defense I have ever seen of Margery Kempe, though I must confess myself one of the unregenerate who find both Dame Margery and her book profoundly irritating. Watkin's is the best brief account available of Augustine Baker, still one of the most helpful guides to the life of prayer. There are also good accounts of lesser known figures such as Thomas Goodwin and John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist.

Toward the understanding of religious sentiment and devotional writing Watkin contributes a remarkable sympathy and an acute awareness of the trials and rewards of the individual consciousness. He has read deeply as well as widely and his charity in judgment is unflagging. His masterful chapter on William Crashaw (the poet's father) could well serve as a model for Catholic writers who deal with similar material. Mr. Watkin himself is an intellectual experience one would do well not to miss. Those who most disagree with him can yet profit from the association.

# Changing Patterns in Patriotism

GOD'S COUNTRY AND MINE. A Declaration of Love Spiced with a Few Harsh Words. By Jacques Barzun. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $5.

By PATRICK F. QUINN

SOON after the first World War one Harold Stearns edited a symposium called *Civilization in the United States* and having done so went to France. Many of the writers who had contributed to the volume were in France already or hoping soon to go. By their reckoning, the quality of American life and culture was intolerable. Nothing could be done for it but to deplore the fact and find the good life elsewhere. The "expatriate" experience, described so well by Malcolm Cowley in *Exile's Return,* was under way. But now, soon enough after the second World War, appears a book the title and intention of which would have been all but incomprehensible to Stearns and his friends of the twenties. Thus may history reverse itself; and it seems more likely than not that when Jacques Barzun, at a tender age, was en route to America he passed in mid-Atlantic at least one disgruntled expatriate who thought to find God's country in Mr. Barzun's native land.



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Yet history may also repeat itself. If *Civilization in the United States* has any claim on our attention today it is because the book is so obviously dated, and, as such, so revealing of the temper of the twenties. Despite its pretentious title, the book has no permanent interest. Similarly with *God's Country and Mine*. Like its earlier, opposite number, it seems destined to become a museum piece, a fossil of the fifties. This is all too easy a guess on my part, and not much of an evaluation. For though some books, like some wines, age badly, this disability takes time to develop. Meanwhile the wines remain potable and the books (this one especially) quotable.

For instance, on the subject of hospitals: ". . . a factory run by engineers. The word 'care' has lost its humane meaning and acquired a statistical one which is not at all pleasant. . . . Your illness is not your own, it's a segment of community life. Very well, but if this is modern medical care, one somehow wants to spell it with a 'k'." And on the national pastime: "Baseball *is* Greek in being national, heroic, and broken up in the rivalry of city-states. . . . Is there not a poetic symbol in the new meaning—our meaning—of 'Ruth hits Homer'?"

The book lacks an index, but if it had one would we find the name of Homer there? Presumably not. I raise the question only to suggest how informal and conversational Mr. Barzun's writing is. He is not attempting a treatise on American values, a systematic inquiry into what America means. What we have instead is a suite of essays on the various themes and topics that are of interest to the author and that he, without much effort, can get his readers interested in. The range is wide enough for anyone. Hospitals and baseball, the values of the professional businessman and the attitudes of the professional European, our fascination with gadgets and with jargon, how our railroads and postal service, our refrigerators and electric shavers might all be redesigned and made more efficient—Mr. Barzun is at home with more subjects than one can shake a stick at. And really at home. Facts and specifications are constantly tumbling out of his enormous filing cabinets and fed smoothly into the current of his fluent, urbane prose.

Urbane means suave; it used to mean urban. Both meanings of the word are in order here. Although one of the book's most vivid chapters is a detailed and trenchant indictment of the Greatest City in the World, the author's viewpoint seems to be that of a confirmed New Yorker, less cosmopolitan than metropolitan. At the start of the book and again at the end Mr. Barzun reminds himself and us that Manhattan is not America. However, the reminder comes both too soon and too late. Most of the matters that arise for discussion are primarily urban rather than national in interest, or, more exactly, somehow given an urban look. It seems odd that Mr. Barzun, who is a distinguished historian, could so divest himself of *that* role in writing these essays, and yet could not get a wider angle of vision than the one this


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book employs. His reflections on American life are those of an alert and highly contemporary mind, looking out on God's country and finding it, on the whole, good. His vantage point is not atop an ivory tower, but on one of steel, glass, and stone in the New York skyline. An interesting view is to be had, of course, but one still too limited and local for the vast subject at hand.

## Children of Night

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER. By Davis Grubb. Harper. $3.

By JEAN HOLZHAUER

TO write convincingly and sympathetically about children is apparently one of the most difficult of possible assignments for present day authors. Perhaps it is for any authors; certainly it is a rare thing to find in a novel or short story a child who is more than merely a shrunken grown-up. Pearl and John Harper, the young protagonists of Davis Grubb's novel, present a problem still more difficult; not only are they children, but rather idiotic children, and in this latter characteristic they unhappily mirror all of the adult figures in *The Night of the Hunter.*

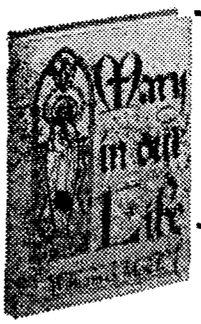
It is hard to know Mr. Grubb's intention in writing a book populated wholly by the simple and the mad. However faithfully such portraits may reflect reality in his setting, the bottom lands of West Virginia, on paper they strain the limits of credulity and border on farce. This is a pity, since the author when not indulging in a "Pshaw, now, ma, the boy didn't mean nothin' by his loose talk" level of writing, shows considerable dramatic power.

Ben Harper, the father of Pearl and John, is arrested and subsequently hung for a robbery and double murder. He successfully conceals the ten thousand dollar loot, however, in his daughter's rag doll, and before "the blue men" take him away, he entrusts the secret to John, age nine. When Ben's cell mate, Preacher Harry Powell, appears on the scene he marries Ben's widow and badgers the children into terror and flight trying to find the money.

A half dozen adults including the children's mother witness this ugly development but realize only vaguely that something is wrong with Ben's boy. It occurs to no one until almost too late that something is wrong with Preacher, a psychotic criminal who as an instrument of the Lord murders prostitutes in his spare time.

The story's climax is typical of the mentality of the characters and the atmosphere of the book.

The children escape, following the murder of their mother, and take shelter with a "strong old woman" of the swamps, Rachel. When Preacher discovers them he lays siege to Rachel's house and then, one dark midnight, breaks in. Rachel knows he is coming; she has been watching him from the kitchen window and awaiting him, her shotgun across her knees. When he approaches she gathers the children in the kitchen and tells them Bible stories and sings hymns. The scene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is melodrama, but not bad as melodrama. One can await even a foreseeable outcome with a sense of suspense. But almost as if to deliberately destroy the mood, almost with a wry, farcical gesture, Mr. Grubb interjects:

"It would have been the simplest matter in the world to go to the phone in the hall and take down the receiver and crank til Miz Booher answered and tell her to get the Troopers up here quick from Parkersburg. And yet this was the last thing that would have entered Rachel Cooper's mind. She had a deep, bottomlands mistrust of civil law."

This kind of thing is hard to take. In the midst of pity and terror, one rather wishes for another incredible (but so much healthier) fictional character, the Lady from Philadelphia, to step in and set matters right.

---

## Boy Lost

PERDU. By Paride Rombi. Harper. $2.75.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

IT is too bad that this novel cannot be published simply as what it is, an unaffected brief tale by a man who evidently saw similar events in real life from a position on the sidelines (the author is an Examining Magistrate in an Italian court). Its dust jacket bears a doubly unfair statement that *Perdu* is "a drama acted out . . . under the same merciless Mediterranean sun that shone on the murder of Agamemnon, the blinding of Oedipus, the sacrifice of Iphigenia." It is unfair not only because it can cause the reader to expect more or less than he is going to get—depending on how he feels about jacket copy—but because the novel itself does not ask for such treatment.

This novel asks to be presented as an interesting anecdote, told not with perfect style and eloquence but with mostly unobtrusive simplicity. Though otherwise just about the reverse of the ancient tragic treatment and concept, it is an extended "recognition scene." A Sardinian boy, Perdu, is awakened one night by the


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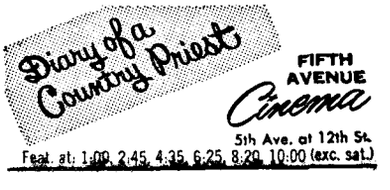





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screams of his mother and finds her stabbed to death in her bed. He discovers soon enough who has killed her, and a few years later comes to know his mother's unhappy and sordid story, as well as the humiliating truth about his real father; he then runs away and dies.

From an incident like this a tragedy quite possibly could be made. The boy is a victim of evil widening into evil, and he represents an innocent perceptor trying to find some direction in a flood of malign circumstances. Around him the author draws some sketchy characterizations of two or three Sardinian towns, sharp but not full enough to give the story either breadth or profundity. Rombi's novel, if it makes an aesthetic attempt, nonetheless retains the sound of a magistrate's anecdote. Its force is the force of the facts in the case rather than any surge of horror; the story is shocking rather than tragic. If we are touched at last with real pity when Perdu's young body is found near a wheatfield, gleaming with the bright wings of many flies, it is pity for any child so soon and so horridly dead, for we have known this boy heretofore as little more than a name in a case history, attached to certain pitiable reactions.

It is an interesting case history to be sure, and it does not matter that Perdu's reactions are what we would expect them to be. In tragic stories, anything very far from "stock response" would be out of place. What matters is whether the responses are personal and newly symbolic of all human dismay. Perdu has not that much individuality about him, he is not a genuine aesthetic creation.

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## Americana

THE OLD COUNTRY STORE. By Gerald Carson. Oxford. $5.

By JOHN COURNOS

"WHOLLY delightful" is a cliché that may aptly, and truthfully, be applied to this chronicle of a phase of American life often dealt with in our fiction, but rarely given serious attention as a singularly indigenous phenomenon having significance as a basic civilizing force in the pre-motorcar, pre-television, pre-gadget era.

Mr. Carson, a retired advertising executive who has had considerable experience in promoting automobiles, packaged soaps and breakfast foods, and a share in eliminating the old general store, confesses to having written this book as "a tribute—and an atonement."

The humor of this book is infectious. The keeper of a country store was inevitably a character, and characters met in his store, which was the meeting place, the informal parliament, of any small community throughout the country. He had to be smart, and often slick, to prosper and to give as good as he got. Barter of goods, and barter of wit, went hand in hand. He had a serious rival, too, in the Yankee peddler, who traveled long ways, and of whose acumen and wit Mr. Carson has many good stories to tell. A characteristic specimen is attributed to a Yankee drummer: "I never could


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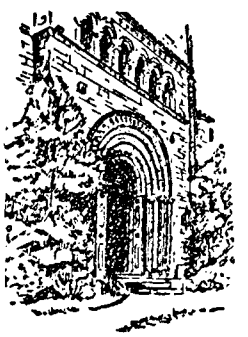

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see why it is necessary to tell a lie when the truth can be just as misleading."

The country store sold everything; occasionally, even a coffin. This well-documented volume covers the period from 1790 to 1921; old store records, diaries, newspapers and county histories have gone into its making.

This informal history of the country store should provide unmitigated pleasure for all sorts of readers. The "old fogy" will enjoy it as a spectacle of a vanished life to which he himself may, in some measure, have been a witness. The television devotee may pat himself on the back that he, at any rate, has escaped all such hill-billy nonsense and inconvenience. Yet another reader will derive nostalgic pleasure and yearn for just such a life free from the complications and headaches of a hurry-scurry, war-ridden existence. Altogether this is a much-needed job, well done.

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## Evil Spirits

GHOSTS AND POLTERGEISTS. By Herbert Thurston, S.J. Edited by J. H. Grehan, S.J Regnery. $4.

By FRANCIS SWEENEY

THERE are, of course, no poltergeists in Massachusetts. But the less said about New Hampshire the better! As late as A.D. 1682, in a locality called Great Island in the Province of New Hampshire, one of the racketing spirits bedevilled a certain Walton family by throwing stones, breaking windows and doors, blowing haycocks into trees. Moreover, a candlestick, a spit and a hammer moved about as if of their own accord. The phenomena were recorded with the authority of Richard Chamberlain, secretary of the Province, and Increase Mather, president of Harvard.

It was not the only instance of poltergeist activity in this country. In 1852 the Boston *Pilot* gave its readers this timely warning: "It is not well to listen to these things, but really some reputable witnesses



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have testified that this same monkey ghost has troubled several families in England and America within the few last years."

Father Thurston, the British historian and hagiographer, thought it well, for half a lifetime, "to listen to these things." His papers on poltergeist infestation, now collected by Father J. H. Crehan, are an impressive record calculated to give pause to anyone who greets all reports of "spooks" with the confident incredulity of the Irishman confronted with a giraffe.

Here is Father Thurston's definition of the strange nuisance: "A poltergeist is simply a racketing spirit, which manifests its presence by throwing things about, knocking fireirons together and creating an uproar, in the course of which the human spectators are occasionally hit by flying objects, but as a rule suffer no serious injury."

His book is a file of astounding instances of poltergeist monkey-shines from the twelfth century to the year 1929. The data were gathered from England and Ireland and the continent, from India and America. Father Thurston notes similarities in the cases: a person, usually a child, who seems to be the "medium" or occasion in whose presence the phenomena occur; suspension of physical laws at the whim of the teasing spirit; immunity from the rites of exorcism.

The evidence was sufficient to warrant Thurston's admitting himself to be a "firm believer in the reality of poltergeists and in the impossibility of finding any natural explanation of their recorded activities." His reputation as a scholar and demolisher of unfounded pious beliefs gives weight to this conclusion, which was substantially shared by Andrew Lang and William James. Yet some readers may judge that Thurston accepts rather uncritically the accounts of ancient poltergeist activity, perhaps because of the "slight bias of mind to the marvelous and preternatural" which Whittier, in his review of *Demonology and Witchcraft,* remarked in Sir Walter Scott. The recent instances are recorded more cogently and amply justify Thurston's conclusion.

BISHOP HEALY: Beloved Outcaste. By Albert S. Foley, S. J. Farrar, Strauss. $3.50.

THE biography of an American Negro who was the Bishop of Portland, Maine, from 1875 to 1900. His father was an Irish immigrant, his mother a mulatto slave born in Georgia. He was educated for the priesthood in the Sulpician Seminary in Montreal. In the course of a distinguished and occasionally harassed ecclesiastical career he came to be in great demand as an orator.

**REVIEWERS**

**Erwin W. Geissman teaches at Fordham and serves as an editor of the quarterly *Cross Currents*.**

**Patrick F. Quinn is a member of the Wellesley faculty.**

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**John Cournos contributes frequently to The Commonweal and other review media.**

**Father Francis Sweeney, S. J., teaches at Boston College.**

## Personal

Students from fifty-six American colleges and universities submitted essays in the contest marking The Commonweal's Thirtieth Anniversary. The general title for the essay was "The Catholic in a Democratic Society." The contest —for which a friend of The Commonweal donated a $1000 prize —was open to undergraduate students.

The final judges for the contest will be the Most Reverend John J. Wright, Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts; Representative Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota (who taught at St. Thomas College before he was elected to Congress); and Professor Helen C. White, well-known author and a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin. These judges will receive numbered manuscripts without indication of author or school. The winning essay will be published in The Commonweal.

The following schools are represented in the contest: St. Louis, Minnesota, Brescia, Emmanuel, the Loyolas (Chicago, Los Angeles and Baltimore), Notre Dame, Manhattan, Gonzaga, St. Edward's, Siena Heights, Our Lady of the Elms, De Paul, Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas, Mercyhurst, Johns Hopkins, Detroit, Princeton, Boston College and Boston U., Anna Maria, Maryville, Marquette, Portland, Sacred Heart Junior, Georgetown, Kansas, Catholic U., Appalachian State Teachers, Mt. St. Vincent, U. of Connecticut, St. Mary's U., Le Moyne, Seton Hill, Mundelein, Mt. St. Mary's, Texas Wesleyan, Columbia, Tennessee, Notre Dame (Baltimore), Xavier U., Ursuline, St. Catherine's, St. John's (Collegeville), George Washington, Santa Clara, Yale, St. Benedict's (Atchison), Marylhurst, Our Lady of Cincinnati, Fordham, New Rochelle, Regis and St. Genevieve's.


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